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On
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HEADWEAR WITH ARTICLE SECURING APERTURE

Field of the Invention

The claimed invention relates generally to the field of headwear and more particularly, but without limitation, to a sports cap type headwear with one or more apertures extending through a crown of the headwear to secure a longitudinally extending article, such as a golf tee, for handy use by a wearer.

Background

Various forms of sports-related headwear have been disclosed in the art to secure golf tees and other articles (e.g., turf repair tools, sunglasses, etc.) within such headwear in a manner such that the articles are maintained out of the way and at the same time readily accessible when needed by a wearer. Such headwear has generally incorporated the use of pockets, external sleeves and loops, etc. to secure the articles.

While perhaps operable, there nevertheless remains a continued need for improved headwear that secures such articles in an easily manufactured and efficient manner while at the same time substantially maintaining the same overall appearance and style of the headwear, with or without the articles in place, and it is to such improvements that the present invention is generally directed.

Summary of the Invention

In accordance with preferred embodiments, a headwear is provided which secures a longitudinally extending article, such as a golf tee.

The headwear comprises a crown adapted to substantially conform to a wearer's head, with the crown formed from at least one substantially planar panel having opposing interior and exterior surfaces. An aperture extends through the panel from the interior surface to the exterior surface.

When the article is inserted through the aperture, a proximal end of the article is contactingly supported adjacent to the exterior surface of the panel and a medial portion of the article extends adjacent to and substantially parallel with the interior surface of the panel. In this way, the proximal end of the article remains visible and the medial portion of the article is hidden behind the panel when the headwear is viewed from a vantage point a selected distance away from the headwear. Preferably, the aperture is characterized as a slit and takes on a “button-hole” type configuration.

In further preferred embodiments, the headwear comprises a second aperture in the panel which is aligned with the first aperture so that a distal end of the article extends through the second aperture and is contactingly supported adjacent the exterior surface of the panel. In such embodiments, this further allows the distal end of the article to be viewed from the aforementioned vantage point.

In other preferred embodiments, the headwear further comprises an interior headband affixed to the panel and which extends about an interior circumference of the crown. The aperture is located in the panel so that, upon insertion of the article through said aperture, the medial portion and the distal end of the article are contactingly supported in a gap between the interior surface of the panel and the headband.

The headwear is preferably characterized as a sports cap having a bill which projects from the crown to form a visor for the wearer. The panel in which the aperture (or both apertures) is formed can be toward the front of the headwear adjacent the bill, or can be toward the rear of the headwear opposite the bill.

In yet further embodiments, the headwear further comprises a backing layer which is affixed to the inner surface of the panel to form a closed sleeve to accommodate and enclose the medial portion of the article.

In still yet another embodiment, an apparatus is provided which provides the headwear as described above in combination with a golf tee inserted into the headwear.

These various embodiments provide several advantages, including ease of manufacturability over prior art implementations as well as the ability to substantially maintain the overall appearance and style of the headwear with or without the article(s) installed therein. Prior art implementations generally provide

what may be referred to as an “empty-holster” configuration; that is, a pouch, loop or external layer of material is provided in the headwear and such tend to detract from the overall appearance of the headwear unless the article is installed. By contrast, the aperture(s) of the present invention are largely innocuous, allowing the headwear to be worn in other settings with or without the article(s) in place.

These and various other features and advantages which characterize the claimed invention will become apparent upon reading the following detailed description and upon reviewing the associated drawings.

10 **Brief Description of the Drawings**

FIG. 1 is an isometric representation of a headwear (also referred to as a “sports cap” and a “ball cap”) having a crown and a bill, the headwear constructed in accordance with preferred embodiments of the present invention to support one or more longitudinally extending articles (in this case, golf tees) in the crown.

15 FIG. 2 provides an elevational view of a portion of a panel of the crown of FIG. 1.

FIG. 3 is a side elevational, cross-sectional view of FIG. 2.

FIG. 4 illustrates an alternative embodiment to the view of FIG. 3 and includes an internal backing layer affixed to the interior surface of the panel.

20 FIG. 5 illustrates another alternative embodiment to the view of FIG. 3 and shows the golf tee inserted between the panel and an interior headband.

FIG. 6 is an interior view of the headwear corresponding to FIG. 5.

FIG. 7 illustrates another alternative embodiment similar to that shown in FIG. 5 with the addition of a protective layer to reduce wear from the distal pointy end of the golf tee.

25 FIG. 8 illustrates the headwear of FIG. 1 in accordance with another embodiment in which the golf tees are supported in rearward panels opposite the bill.

30 FIG. 9 shows another headwear characterized as a visor-type sports cap with a crown formed of a single panel, and a single horizontally disposed golf tee secured therein.

Detailed Description

FIG. 1 provides an isometric representation of a headwear 100 constructed in accordance with preferred embodiments of the present invention. The headwear 100, also referred to herein as a “sports cap” and a “ball cap,” has a generally conventional construction except as described in detail below.

The headwear 100 includes a substantially hemispherically shaped crown 102 and a bill 104 which projects from the crown 102. The crown 102 is adapted to substantially conform to a wearer’s head and is formed of a plurality of substantially planar, triangular gores, or panels 106 (six in this example) which are stitched together as shown. The panels 106 are each preferably constructed of a single layer of flexible fabric material, such as a cotton or cotton blend canvas type material. Another preferred construction of the panels 106 is a stretchable, expandable fabric.

The bill 104 preferably includes a relatively rigid interior web (not shown) formed of cardstock or other similar material that is covered with the same fabric material used in the crown 102. This allows the bill 104 to be shaped as desired by the wearer to act as a visor when the headwear 100 is worn in a conventional, “bill-forward” configuration. An ornamental button 108 is secured to the top of the crown 102 and is also preferably covered by the same fabric of the crown 102.

Of particular interest in FIG. 1 are a plurality of upper and lower apertures 110, 112 which are shown to extend through a selected one of the panels 106 to accommodate and secure an associated number of longitudinally extending articles 114. The articles are shown to comprise conventionally constructed golf tees of the type having ball support surfaces (not designated) to contactingly support a golf ball during a game of golf, although other types of articles (e.g., a turf repair tool, a pen/pencil, a flashlight, sunglasses, etc.) can readily be used as well.

As further shown in FIG. 2, the apertures 110, 112 preferably comprise slits with adjacent loops of reinforcing threads 116 around the peripheries thereof, so that the apertures 110, 112 each have a substantially “button-hole” type construction.

Each one of the golf tees 114 is preferably inserted through an associated pair of the apertures 110, 112 so that respective proximal and distal ends 118, 120 of the golf tee 114 are contactingly supported adjacent an outer surface 122 of the

panel 106 and a medial portion 124 of the golf tee 114 lies contactingly adjacent and substantially parallel to an inner surface 126 of the panel 106. This configuration is best viewed in FIG. 3. In this way, the proximal end 118 of the tee 114 remains visible and the medial portion 124 of the tee 114 is hidden behind the panel 106 when the headwear 100 is viewed from a vantage point a selected distance (e.g., a few feet) away from the headwear 100.

The proximal ends 118 of the golf tees are provided with the aforementioned golf support surfaces and thus have a larger effective diameter than the medial portion 124. Each of the apertures 110 are preferably sized to readily permit sliding passage of the medial portion 124 therethrough, yet limit further movement of the tee 114 through the aperture 110 once the expanding diameter of the tee 114 at the proximal end 118 substantially equals the diameter of the aperture.

In this way, the tees 114 are generally further retained within the headwear 100 by frictional and/or compressive forces exerted by the walls of the apertures 110 upon the proximal ends of the tees. The use of a stretchable, expandable fabric in the panels 106, and/or the use of reinforcing threads with elastomeric fibers can further make the apertures 110, 112 expandable. An advantage of this latter approach includes the fact that a generally smaller diameter aperture can be used to accommodate the article. Also, an expandable aperture further tends to cause the aperture to “close” to a greater degree when the article is removed, further causing the aperture to blend in with the surrounding panel and thus making the aperture more innocuous when the article is removed.

FIG. 4 illustrates an alternative preferred embodiment in which an additional backing layer 128 is affixed to the inner surface 126 of the panel 106 to form a closed sleeve between the upper and lower apertures 110, 112 to accommodate and enclose the medial portion 124 of the tee 114. The backing layer 128 preferably comprises a layer of canvas or semi-elastic fabric that is stitched or glued to the panel 106.

FIG. 5 provides another alternative preferred embodiment of the present invention. In FIG. 5, each one of the golf tees 114 is preferably inserted through a corresponding, single aperture 130 so that the proximal end 118 remains exposed adjacent the outer surface of the panel 106 and both the distal end 120 and the

medial portion 124 extend adjacent to and are hidden adjacent the inner surface 126 of the panel 106, as before. Preferably, the distal end 120 and medial portion 124 are further disposed between the panel 106 and an interior headband 132 which extends about the interior circumference of the crown 102. FIG. 6 provides a side elevational representation of FIG. 5.

A flap portion 134 of the panel wraps back up and is affixed to a lower portion of the headband 132 in a conventional manner. This advantageously forms a suitable interior pouch into which the tee 114 can extend. As desired, a layer of protective material 136 can be disposed at the base of the flap portion 134, as shown in FIG. 7, to remove strain upon the panel material and reduce the propensity of the pointy distal end 120 of the golf tee 114 to puncture or wear through the panel 106 over time.

FIG. 8 shows the headwear 100 in accordance with yet another preferred embodiment. In this embodiment, the apertures 110, 112 are formed in adjacent rear panels 106 of the crown 102. The configuration of FIG. 8 accommodates a total of four (4) golf tees 114, with two (2) tees on each side of a size adjustment band 138 opposite the bill 104.

FIG. 9 illustrates another headwear 140 characterized as a visor-type sports cap with a crown 141 formed of a single, circumferentially extending, substantially planar panel 142 shaped to encompass the wearer's head. A bill 144 extends from the crown 141 as before. Apertures 146, 148 are formed in the panel 142 generally as discussed above to accommodate a single golf tee 114. In this case, however, the tee 114 is aligned in a substantially horizontal orientation along the length of the panel 142, as contrasted with the substantially vertical orientation in FIGS. 1-8. Of course, any number of relative angles of the article(s) with respect to the crown 102, 141 can be used as desired.

From the foregoing discussion it can be readily observed that the present invention, as embodied herein and as claimed below, presents several advantages over the prior art. The apertures 110, 112, 130, 146, 148 can be easily and inexpensively incorporated into the manufacturing process used to fabricate the headwear 100, 140, particularly when the apertures take button-hole type configurations as discussed above.

Another advantage is that the apertures are relatively innocuous as compared to prior art approaches involving the incorporation of external pockets, sleeves and other layers of material that are bonded to the exterior surface of the headwear. Thus, the articles can be used in the headwear during an activity where the presence of the articles is desired (e.g., golf tees can be inserted into the apertures during a round of golf) and, at the conclusion of the activity, the articles can be removed and the headwear will substantially return to the original style and appearance of a “conventional” type headwear. In this way, the headwear can be worn in a number of different settings without an unattractive, “empty-holster” effect when the articles are removed.

Yet another advantage is the promotional value that can be achieved using preferred embodiments disclosed herein. It is common for sports caps and other types of headwear to include the trademark (logo or brand) of an athletic equipment supplier, an amateur or professional sports team, or an organization or company. Thus, corresponding marks can be provided on both the headwear and on the article; for example, an exemplary first human discernable symbol “X” is shown on the crown 141 and a corresponding second human discernable symbol “x” is shown on the golf tee 114 in FIG. 9. Providing such corresponding marks on both the crown and on the golf tee in this manner so that the respective marks can be concurrently or consecutively viewed by an observer provides an attractive and effective marketing tie-in for the combination.

For purposes of the appended claims, the recited “means for securing...and for substantially maintaining” will be understood to correspond to the various disclosed alternative embodiments of FIGS. 1-9 and includes the respective apertures 110, 112, 130, 146, 148 sized to accommodate a golf tee so that the tee is either inserted through a pair of apertures or through one aperture and into the gap between the panel 106 and the headband 132. The apertures are characterized as button-hole type slits and are largely innocuous when the golf tees are removed.

Thus, prior art structures that do not have the golf tee (or other article) supported through an aperture that extends through a panel of the crown are not covered by this element and are expressly excluded from the definition of an equivalent. Moreover, prior art structures that project the article in a direction

normal to the panel, as opposed to substantially parallel to the panel, are expressly excluded as well.

It is to be understood that even though numerous characteristics and advantages of various embodiments of the present invention have been set forth in the foregoing description, together with details of the structure and function of various embodiments of the invention, this detailed description is illustrative only, and changes may be made in detail, especially in matters of structure and arrangements of parts within the principles of the present invention to the full extent indicated by the broad general meaning of the terms in which the appended claims are expressed.

In addition, although the embodiments described herein are directed to a sports-related headwear that secures one or more golf tees, it will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that any number of different types of headwear and articles can be used without departing from the spirit and scope of the claimed invention.